

MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church & Society REPORT

Report 27

August, 1979

Focus on New Men/New Roles

by Herta Funk

Although "femininity" implies "masculinity" and the roles of women imply the roles of men, the position of women in society and the church has received much more recent attention than that of men. Christians as a whole have scarcely begun to deal with the issues raised by the Gospel for men in modern society. The New Men/New Roles conference provided an opportunity to reflect on men's lives. About 85 persons gathered at Mennonite Brethren College, Winnipeg, on June 15-17 for the event, which was likely the first of its kind in church circles.

Three purposes were outlined for the conference:

1. To bring together men and women who wish to explore the implications of the Christian Gospel for sex roles today.
2. To focus special attention on what society expects of men and the consequences of these expectations for men, for women, for society as a whole, and for international relations.
3. To develop strategies for change which will involve women and men working in equal partnership to eradicate sexism and discrimination in their own lives, in the church, and in other institutions.

Kathleen Storrie, sociologist at the University of Saskatchewan, first envisioned the conference, and persons from Mennonite, Quaker, Catholic, United Church of Canada, Anglican and other traditions were drawn into the planning. Participants came from across Canada and the United States, even from New Zealand. A fairly equal number of men and women were present.

The conference convinced me that we have only begun to explore masculinity and its ramifications for personal and public life, including the peace issue. We are probably heading into a time of diversity of views, even confusion, on the meaning of men's liberation. The hard work of creating our own synthesis of the sociological realities of men's roles and our understanding of the Gospel lies ahead.

Herta Funk, who assembled materials for this issue, was instrumental in organizing the New Men/New Roles Conference. She is director of adult education and women's role in the church for the General Conference Mennonite Church. The writers for this issue are part of the process of reflection on men's issues.

FREE HUMAN BEINGS IN CHRIST

Bernie Wiebe

What did Paul mean in Galatians 3:28, "We are no longer Jews or Greeks or slaves or free men or even merely men or women, but we are all the same--we are Christians; we are one in Christ Jesus" (Living Bible)?

Was Paul suggesting an equilibrium of power, equal rights, "carbon copies" one of another?

In the women's awareness (feminist) movement, the impression frequently has been that women want to be like men. It's partly understandable because men are the holders of power, the aggressors, the tough ones.

More recently Christian feminists have realized that there will be little new "female freedom" unless men also make some adjustments.

At the New Men/New Roles Conference, about 75 men and women studied the meaning of being "new men in light of the gospel." The conference was cosponsored by Canadian Women and Religion, the General Conference Mennonite Church Commission on Education, and Mennonite Central Committee (Manitoba).

Elizabeth and Perry Yoder, authors of the book New Men/New Roles, shared how Paul emphasizes that Christ's death and resurrection symbolizes what happens to women and men "in Christ." Both take on a "new creation" with new attitudes. Persons in Christ are freed from their old ways of judging; they are now on a new foundation which calls both women and men to base their "authority" on the nurturing of each other in Christ. Christian power comes from learning to "share Christ's forgiving and saving power with other persons."

Norman Walsh, coordinator of the Canadian Friends Service Committee, led a multimedia presentation titled "Masculinity and Peace," which included a slide set "Do Cowboys Ever Become Cowmen?" He showed many samples of society's combination of violence with masculine images. "Only two animal species regularly destroy their own, men and rats," he said. "In terms of today's macho-male mystique," he continued, "Jesus might easily have been declared a sissy or too feminine. But in Jesus' character model is a real hope for peace-building relationships."

George Lakey, a Quaker who co-authored the book Moving Toward a New Society and is a member of the movement for a New Society in Philadelphia, said there are perils in being "success objects", in his address on "Masculinity and Success." Today's male is never secure because he is always expected to be challenging a person ahead of him for his job. That's the only way to "succeed." It leaves most men with negative feelings toward themselves.

Lakey suggested that our male-dominated society is full of put-downs. The church offers a vision of what we could be like. But too often the church takes signals from society rather than characterizing the new ideals of the Bible. Christians need to be brave enough to live "new models in Christ," both male and female.

Lakey said their community is a model based on community, equality, simplicity, social action, love, personal growth, and vision and hope.

David Schroeder chaired a panel discussion on "Masculinity and Sexuality." Other panel members were Gordon Toombs, Bryan Teixeira, Bill Dwyer, and Harry Hurtado. Tom Graff and Heather Bishop provided entertainment.

Small group process took much of the conference time. In these groups persons explored their own feelings, beliefs, and experiences about being males and females "in light of the gospel."

Probably the best justification for such a conference was expressed in one sharing session. One man reported, "I have traditionally regarded only those things important that enhance my job and my image as a man. Here I have begun to realize the significance of relating to my own family, especially sharing more intimately in the total life of my wife. It will not only make her feel better about herself; it will make me more the kind of man Jesus Christ wants me to be."

REFLECTING ON NEW MEN/NEW ROLES

Rosie Epp, Wichita, Kansas

Several experiences on my return to Wichita from the New Men/New Roles conference are significant in my reflections on the conference. The first experience illustrates the confusion which is prevalent in society because roles are changing. The male friend who picked me up at the airport said to me that he didn't know whether he should offer to carry my bag or to allow me to carry it. While the incident is minor, it does point to the need to discuss traditional roles, in this case, that a male is strong and is to be a gentleman.

My return came after another weekend scare from the BTK, a local killer who's victims are always women. It is assumed that the BTK is male. The BTK reports remind me that violence is a common way for American males to deal with problems and frustrations. Traditionally force is a method for men to show their superiority over women, who are supposed to be weak, helpless beings. While the BTK is caught in a stereotype which is oppressing him and thus needs changing, so many women, especially in Wichita, Kansas, are living in fear, a fear which has them bound, a fear which is keeping them from doing many things they might otherwise do. My anger at this type of "role modeling" by both men and women raised within me a determination to attempt in some way to counter society's present definition of what it means to be masculine and feminine.

The third experience which aided in my reflection to the conference was an article in the Wichita Sunday paper entitled, "Men in Transition." The fact that the local newspaper not only carried the BTK warnings, but also featured an article on the need for American men to change their roles, expectations, and values, strengthened my faith/hope that this is an alive issue, an issue which must be dealt with by both men and women in contemporary society. Not only are the roles of women in need of change, but also the roles of men, so that our society can become that community of whole, free human beings who are "all they were meant to be" envisioned by God at creation.

These three experiences made me keenly aware of the necessity of a conference like New Men/New Roles which more persons, especially men, would attend. For as was noted several times during the conference, women will have a difficult, if not impossible, time changing their roles if the roles of men do not also change. Thus for me the biggest frustration of the weekend was the low attendance by males. Someone stated, "Over half attending this conference are women, and over half of the men attending are gay." My question, why the absence of straight males? They certainly were not at home with the kids and housework.

As far as I'm concerned the conference was a success for two reasons: One reason was the interaction and discussion which took place in my small group. In that group, the nitty-gritty of our personal response to the issue took place. The group began by

sharing early encounters of how our lives and thoughts were shaped in regard to what it means to be male. We wrestled with encounters we had and are facing in relation to the barriers created by traditional masculine and feminine stereotypes. How to become an androgynous person, including the pit-falls and the advantages of such a model, was discussed intently by the group. The group process would not have been complete without our helping each other devise one or two definite steps we could take when we returned to our homes and jobs which would begin/continue the transition to new roles for men and women.

In addition to the significant processing which took place within the small group, I found the input by George Lakey on "Masculinity and Success" a session which put the issue into a new perspective. To realize that sex roles and economy (and power) are closely linked, and that system change, more than personal change, is needed before there is human liberation caused a bit of hopelessness. However, the recognition of the root was in a sense a focusing, and thus a strengthening force. And, as George Lakey stated, the hope lies in helping the church realize the oppressiveness of the system and then to create a vision of society as it ought to be. A spark that this vision for the church can be a reality is that upon my return I attended a worship planning meeting with the committee from my congregation at which it was decided to spend the month of September on roles, a Sunday each on sexuality, singleness, men's lives, and family models. There is hope.

I also appreciated the involvement by other church denominations. At time Mennonites tend to isolate themselves and the mixing of various perspectives added a great deal to the conference and to the issue of roles.

A PERSONAL RESPONSE

Abe Bergen, Winnipeg, Manitoba

When I think about what it means for me to be man I am aware (and the conference emphasized this) that the ideal towards which I strive is shaped more by my culture than by Biblical teaching. I have been taught to be rational, controlled, logical and to repress the vast store of emotions that arise within me. How that robs me of experiencing life with the intensity of feelings that God intended. A man needs to be aggressive, competitive, tough rather than passive, cooperative and supportive. How constrictive if that's not my nature! In all situations I am to appear strong, on top, dominating. How oppressive and violent towards others! If I cultivate these masculine qualities I am told by society that I will be successful, secure, a leader. What a price to pay!

I have long been aware that "lording it over people" is contrary to the Biblical ideal of personhood, that Jesus often made himself vulnerable in his relationships and that Paul challenges the leader to take the role of the servant. But that's theoretical. It's difficult to live it out even within the church and family structures, in a society where men are expected to act the opposite. Change is slow and difficult when there are few role models and even fewer understanding persons with whom to share some of the struggles. This is where I found the New Men/New Roles Conference most helpful. Besides giving me some new insights into why I am the way I am, I could see that many were doing something about the way they were and that was encouraging. In the small groups I found support and understanding for the feelings and struggles I had. I found hope in the fact that we as Christians need not accept the stereotyped, restrictive roles and molds which society attempts to force us into, but can already live as new creations who have been transformed by God's power.

WHAT MAKES A MAN A MAN?

Harold E. Bauman, Elkhart, Indiana

Workshops on women's liberation have been around for some time. A workshop on men's liberation is a new step, not just a ripple effect of women's search but a necessary step for men.

On Saturday evening David Schroeder chaired a panel which dealt with some ways to view sexuality in the male. Some of the widest divergence of views emerged at this point. While discussion followed there was not time to test all of the views in the light of the scriptures.

The wide diversity in the backgrounds and expectations of the persons who came soon became evident. More crucial was the diversity in the assumptions upon which persons founded their views, thus making dialogue on issues very difficult. While the planning committee had intended for the dialogue to focus upon the search for faithfulness in the light of the gospel, the weekend was not long enough to engage and examine all the divergent views presented. The fact that some persons broadened the scope of the workshop resulted in a lack of focus which weakened the net effect considerably.

The central issue which emerged in regard to roles was not unexpected: are there qualities of person which are unique to men (and others to women)? Are there basic human qualities which both men and women will possess, none exclusively by one sex or the other? When Jesus is our pattern to become fully human, is he the same pattern for men and for women? The fruit of the Spirit is the fulness of the character of Jesus; the contrast with the ideal man of western society is striking. In what ways, if any, will the embodiment of the fruit of the Spirit differ in men and women? No conclusive answers acceptable to all seemed possible.

You know that men who are considered rulers lord it over others forcing them to feel authority. But it must not be so among you for whoever wishes to take first place among you must be servant of all.

Mark 10:42b - 44

Related Resources

BOOKS ON MEN AND CHANGING GENDER ROLES

Benson, Dan. The Total Man (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publ., 1977).

*Bianchi, Eugene C. and Ruether, Rosemary Radford. From Machism to Mutuality: Woman-Man Liberation (New York: Paulist Press, 1976).

*David, Deborah S. and Brannon, Robert. The Forty-Nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role (Reading, Miss.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1976).

- *Farrell, Warren. The Liberated Man (New York: Random House, 1974).
Available in paperback (Bantam, \$1.95).
- Fasteau, Marc Feigen. The Male Machine (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974). Now available as a Delta paperback, \$2.95.
- Filene, Peter Gabriel. Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1974). Available in paperback (Mentor Books, \$2.50).
- Goldberg, Herb. The Hazards of Being Male (New York: Nash Publishing, 1976).
- Komarovsky, Mirra. Dilemmas of Masculinity: A Study of College Youth (W. W. Norton & Co., 1976).
- Korda, Michael. Male Chauvinism! How it Works and How to Get Free of It (New York: Random House, 1972, 1973).
- Lavender, Lucille. They Cry, Too! (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1976).
- *Levinson, Daniel J. The Seasons of a Man's Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).
- *Malcomson, William L. Success Is a Failure Experience: Male Liberation and the American Myth of Success (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976).
- Marine, Gene. A Male Guide to Women's Liberation (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1972). Available in paperback (Discus/Avon, \$1.65).
- Merrill, Dean. The Husband Book. A Job Description for the Married Man (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publ. House, 1977).
- Nichols, Jack. Men's Liberation: A New Definition of Masculinity (Penguin paperback, \$2.50).
- Pietropinto, Anthony and Simenauer, Jacqueline. Beyond the Male Myth. A Nationwide Survey (New York Times Books, 1977).
- Pleck, Joseph H. and Sawyer, Jack, eds. Men and Masculinity (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974). Available in paperback (Spectrum, \$2.95).
- Raines, Robert A. Success is a Moving Target (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, Publ., 1975).
- Steinmann, Anne and Fox, David J. The Male Dilemma (New York: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1974).
- Steinmetz, Urban G. The Male Mystique (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Marie Press, 1970).

Yoder, Perry and Elizabeth. New Men/New Roles (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1977).

*especially recommended

Audiovisual Listing

This brief collection of audiovisuals focus either on the need for inter-relationship between male and female, changes in role definition or specifically on the male role. The length of the list indicates the newness of the field. (though obviously it is not exclusive).

*Available for Canadian use from: Resource Centre
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3P 0M4

+Available from General Conference Mennonite Church offices:

Audiovisuals
Box 347
Newton, KS 67114

*Fable of He & She: (Learning Corporation of America, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019). This animated fable gently challenges stereotyped thinking and celebrates the joy of individual self expression and new ways of cooperation. (11 minutes/color/intergenerational)

*Different Folks: (Self Incorporated, Agency for Instructional Television, 1111 West 17th St., Bloomington, IN 47401). An exploration of the effects a role reversal has on children as they defend their family's roles to their peers. (15 minutes/color/Junior High - Adult).

+Men's Lives: (New Day Films, P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417). A documentary on growing up male in America. An excellent introduction to the issues. (43 minutes/color/High school - Adult).

Daily Bread: (Teleketics, 1229 S. Santee St., Los Angeles, CA 90015). A series of vignettes dealing with attitudes toward work. The male "success" conditioning comes through strongly.

Masculinity and Peace: (Produced by Norman Walsh, CFSC, 60 Lowther Ave., Toronto, M5R 1C7). Script and slide set on the issues involved. Involves some participation of the audience. Excellent introduction.

*Are We Still Going to the Movies? (McGraw-Hill, call (714) 453-5000 for nearest rental). Explores the ways that sex-role conditioning affects how male and female adolescents relate to each other as sexual beings. Discussion starter/14 minutes/color/Senior High.

This is a Recorded Message: (National Film Board of Canada, any major Canadian city or:

Suite 642
150 Kent St.
Ottawa, Ont.
K1A 0M9

Suite 915
111 East Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60601

Made up of hundreds of cut-out color ads projected in rapid succession, this animated film without words takes a critical look at the conditioning process that underlies consumerism in our world. The film is clear evidence that our sexual conditioning is essentially tied to materialism. 19 minutes/color/adolescent - adult.

To Ourselves, Our Sons, Our Fathers: (Michael Chait, P.O. Box 1959, Grand Central, New York, NY 10017. A collection of 9 personal statements of men. (Unseen) "the film is a social documentary that raises such issues as male love, men's health, work, play, male sexuality, our bodies & our minds." Black & White/30 minutes/\$45.00 rental.

Verbs

An article by Kathryn Neufeld, Fresno, California, "Child-Rearing, Religion, and Abusive Parents" appeared in the May-June, 1979 issue of Religious Education. The article explains the findings of research for her master's degree in Health Sciences at the University of California.

Dorothy Yoder Nyce, Goshen, Indiana has been burning a lot of midnight oil recently while compiling and editing a successor to the "Persons Becoming" packet, which is out of print. Commissioned by the Task Force on Women, the new collection will include articles and poetry from over forty contributors in an 8½ x 11 inch booklet titled Which Way Women? The booklet is scheduled to be available for purchase (cost--\$3) in November.

News

ENABLING FOR ACTION
WOMEN IN MINISTRY 1979

The 1979 Women in Ministry Conference will convene November 2-4 at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana with the theme "Enabling for Action." The conference is billed as "a time for dialogue and consultation between women and men concerning leadership, relationship, and future involvement of women in the churches." To register, contact:

Arlene Mark
AMBS
3003 Benham Avenue
Elkhart, IN 46514

WOMEN AND MWC

Women's concerns was one of the agenda items at the Mennonite World Conference Executive Committee meeting, held May 15-17 in Strasbourg, France. The June issue of the MWC Newsletter carried this report:

There was considerable discussion on the question of women's involvement in the work of Mennonite World Conference. Much dissatisfaction was expressed with the fact that women were not adequately represented at Wichita, particularly as major speakers and as participants in the administration of communion. However, representatives from Africa and Latin America expressed negative reaction to the idea of women officiating in communion. The Asians did not feel that it would be a problem. On the other hand, Asian women are somewhat uncomfortable with the North American women's movement.

The Executive Committee heard a report from General Council member, Mrs. J.A. van Ingen Schenau-Elsen regarding the question of separate women's meetings at the Eleventh Assembly. She reported mixed reaction on the question from discussions in the Netherlands.

The committee directed that the Program Committee shall include several women and also instructed the Executive Secretary to explore the possibility of involving women in a special way in the planning for the General Council Meeting in Nairobi in 1981.

GRADUATE DIRECTORY

The Task Force on Women is still accepting names and resumes of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women who hold graduate degrees for a directory which will be compiled. If your name appears in the "Resource Listing of Mennonite Women" and you would like to be included in the graduate directory, please drop us a note. Interested women should send their name, address and complete resume to: (Please send before December 1).

Peace Section Task Force on Women
21 S. 12th Street
Akron, PA 17501

WOMEN IN MINISTRY FUND DRIVE

Contributions to the Women in Ministry Travel Fund are still welcome! These funds will enable women from the following categories to attend the November 2-4 Women in Ministry conference at Elkhart, Indiana: women in ministry or preparing for church leadership, Mennonite Brethren women, women from ethnic minorities, and women coming from a long distance.

Please send contributions to MCC Peace Section, Akron, PA 17501 designated for the "Women in Ministry travel fund." If you would like to apply for a travel subsidy, also write to Peace Section. The deadline is October 5.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Women:

I would like to express my appreciation to you for compiling and circulating your REPORTS. The information contained is excellent and reflects the search for a new understanding of woman's place.

I was particularly interested in the REPORT which addressed the question of Battered Women and violence in the Family. This whole area must be of concern to everyone if change is to be effected so that women and children (and men) will no longer be the victims of violence. I have conducted workshops in many places in British Columbia and am continually amazed and appalled to rediscover each time how prevalent the battering of women is in our society. Your efforts, and mine, and the committed action of many others is essential if the family is to become, for all, a safe and nurturing place.

Best Wishes,

Donnie Patterson

Donnie Patterson
Gibsons, B.C.

USPS 367-790

The Report is a bi-monthly publication of the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church And Society. Correspondence should be sent to Gayle Gerber Koontz, 27 Fairlawn St., Everett, MA 02149.

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